PENROD

CHAPTER XVIII.
The New Rector.

MR. SCHOFIELD'S version of things was that Penrod was insane. "He's a stark, raving lunatic!" declared the father, descending to the library from a before dinner interview with the outlaw that evening. "I'd send him to a military school, but I don't believe they'd take him. Do you know why he says all that awfulness happened?"

"When Margaret and I were trying to scrub him," responded Mrs. Schofield wearily, "he said 'everybody' had been calling him names."

"Names!" snorted her husband. "'Little gentleman!' That's the vile epithet they called him! And because of it he wrecks the peace of six homes!"

"Sh! Yes. He told us about it," said Mrs. Schofield, moaning. "He told us several hundred times, I should guess, though I didn't count. He's got it fixed in his head, and we couldn't get it out. All we could do was to put him in the closet. He'd have gone out again after those boys if we hadn't. I don't know what to make of him."

"He's a mystery to me," said her husband. "And he refuses to explain why he objects to being called 'little gentleman.' Says he'd do the same thing—and worse—if anybody dared to call him that again. He said if the president of the United States called him that he'd try to whip him. How long did you have him locked up in the closet?"

"Sh!" said Mrs. Schofield warningly. "About two hours. But I don't think it softened his spirit at all, because when I took him to the barber's to get his hair clipped again on account of the tar in it Sammy Williams and Maurice Levy were there for the same reason, and they just whispered 'little gentleman' so low you could hardly hear them—and Penrod began fighting with them right before me, and it was really all the barber and I could do to drag him away from them. The barber was very kind about it, but Penrod"—

"I tell you he's a lunatic!" Mr. Schofield would have said the same thing of a Frenchman infuriated by the epithet "camel." The philosophy of insult needs expounding.

"Sh!" said Mrs. Schofield. "It does seem a kind of frenzy."

"Why on earth should any sane person mind being called"—

"Sh!" said Mrs. Schofield. "It's beyond me!"

"What are you 'sh-ing' me for?" demanded Mr. Schofield explosively.

"Sh!" said Mrs. Schofield. "It's Mr. Kinosling, the new rector of St. Joseph's."

"Where?"

"Sh! On the front porch with Margaret. He's going to stay for dinner. I do hope"—

"Bachelor, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Our old minister was speaking of him the other day," said Mr. Schofield, "and he didn't seem so terribly impressed."

"Sh! Yes; about thirty and, of course, so superior to most of Margaret's friends—boys home from college. She thinks she likes young Robert Williams, I know, but he laughs so much. Of course there isn't any comparison. Mr. Kinosling talks so intellectually. It's a good thing for Margaret to hear that kind of thing for a change. And, of course, he's very spiritual. He seems very much interested in her." She paused to muse. "I think Margaret likes him. He's so different too. It's the third time he's dropped in this week, and I"—

"Well," said Mr. Schofield grimly, "if you and Margaret want him to come again you'd better not let him see Penrod."

"But he's asked to see him. He seems interested in meeting all the family. And Penrod nearly always behaves fairly well at table." She paused and then put to her husband a question referring to his interview with Penrod upstairs. "Did you—did you—do it?"

"No," he answered gloomily. "No. I didn't; but"— He was interrupted by a violent crash of china and metal in the kitchen, a shriek from Della and the outrageous voice of Penrod. The well informed Della, ill inspired to set up for a wit, had ventured to address the scion of the house roguishly as 'little gentleman,' and Penrod by means of the rapid elevation of his right foot had removed from her supporting hands a laden tray. Both parents started for the kitchen, Mr. Schofield completing his interrupted sentence on the way.

"But I will now!"

The rite thus promised was hastily but accurately performed in that apartment most distant from the front porch, and twenty minutes later Penrod descended to dinner. The Rev. Mr. Kinosling had asked for the pleasure of meeting him, and it had been decided that the only course possible was to cover up the scandal for the present, and to offer an undisturbed and smiling family surface to the gaze of the visitor.

Scorched but not bowed, the smoldering Penrod was led forward for the social formulae simultaneously with the somewhat bleak departure of Robert Williams, who took his guitar with him, this time, and went in forlorn unconsciousness of the powerful forces already set in secret motion to be his allies.

The punishment just undergone had but made the haughty and unyielding soul of Penrod more stalwart in revolt. He was unconquered. Every time the one intolerable insult had been offered him his resentment had become the hotter, his vengeance the more instant and furious. And, still burning with outrage, but upheld by the conviction of right, he was determined to continue to the last drop of his blood the defense of his honor, whenever it should be assailed, no matter how mighty or august the powers that attacked it. In all ways, he was a very sore boy.

During the brief ceremony of presentation his usually inscrutable countenance wore an expression interpreted by his father as one of insane obstinacy, while Mrs. Schofield found it an incentive to inward prayer. The fine graciousness of Mr. Kinosling, however, was unimpaired by the glare of virulent suspicion given him by this little brother; Mr. Kinosling mistook it for a natural curiosity concerning one who might possibly become, in time, a member of the family. He patted Penrod upon the head, which was, for many reasons, in no condition to be patted with any pleasure to the pattee. Penrod felt himself in the presence of a new enemy.

"How do you do, my little lad?" said Mr. Kinosling. "I trust we shall become fast friends."

To the ear of his little lad it seemed, he said, "A trost we shall bick-home fawst frainds." Mr. Kinosling's pronunciation was, in fact, slightly precious, and the little lad, simply mistaking it for some cryptic form of mockery of himself, assumed a manner and expression which argued so ill for the proposed friendship that Mrs. Schofield hastily interposed the suggestion of dinner, and the small procession went into the dining room.

"It has been a delicious day," said Mr. Kinosling presently; "warm, but balmy." With a benevolent smile he addressed Penrod, who sat opposite him. "I suppose, little gentleman, you have been indulging in the usual outdoor sports of vacation?"

Penrod laid down his fork and glared open mouthed at Mr. Kinosling.

"You'll have another slice of breast of the chicken?" Mr. Schofield inquired loudly and quickly.

"A lovely day!" exclaimed Margaret, with equal promptitude and emphasis. "Lovely; oh, lovely, lovely!"

"Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!" said Mrs. Schofield, and after a glance at Penrod which confirmed her impression that he intended to say something she continued, "Yes, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!"

Penrod closed his mouth and sank back in his chair, and his relatives took breath.

Mr. Kinosling looked pleased. This responsive family, with its ready enthusiasm, made the kind of audience he liked. He passed a delicate white hand gracefully over his tall, pale forehead and smiled indulgently.

"Youth relaxes in summer," he said. "Boyhood is the age of relaxation; one is playful, light, free, unfettered. One runs and leaps and enjoys one's self with one's companions. It is good for the little lads to play with their friends—they jostle, push and wrestle and simulate little, happy struggles with one another in harmless conflict. The young muscles are toughening. It is good. Boyish chivalry develops, enlarges, expands. The young learn quickly, intuitively, spontaneously. They perceive the obligations of noblesse oblige. They begin to comprehend the necessity of caste and its requirements. They learn what it means—ah—that is, they learn what it means to be well born. They learn courtesy in their games; they learn politeness, consideration for one another in their pastimes, amusements, lighter occupations. I make it my pleasure to join them often, for I sympathize with them in all their wholesome joys as well as in their little bothers and perplexities. I understand them, you see; and let me tell you it is no easy matter to understand the little lads and lasses." He sent to each listener his beaming glance and, permitting it to come to rest upon Penrod, inquired:

"And what do you say to that, little gentleman?"

Mr. Schofield uttered a stentorian cough. "More? You'd better have some more chicken! More! Do!"

"More chicken!" urged Margaret simultaneously. "Do please! Please! More! Do! More!"

"Beautiful, beautiful," began Mrs. Schofield. "Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful"—

It is not known in what light Mr. Kinosling viewed the expression of Penrod's face. Perhaps he mistook it for awe; perhaps he received no impression at all of its extraordinary quality. He was a rather self engrossed young man, just then engaged in a double occupation, for he not only talked, but supplied from his own consciousness a critical though favorable auditor as well, which, of course, kept him quite busy. Besides, it is oftener than is suspected the case that extremely peculiar expressions upon the countenances of boys are entirely overlooked and suggest nothing to the minds of people staring straight at them. Certainly Penrod's expression—which to the perception of his family was perfectly horrible—caused not the faintest perturbation in the breast of Mr. Kinosling.

Mr. Kinosling waived the chicken and continued to talk. "Yes, I think I may claim to understand boys," he said, smiling thoughtfully. "One has been a boy oneself. Ah, it is all playtime! I hope our young scholar here does not overwork himself at his Latin, at his classics, as I did, so that at the age of eight years I was compelled to wear glasses. He must be careful not to strain the little eyes at his scholar's tasks, not to let the little shoulders grow round over his scholar's desk. Youth is golden. We should keep it golden, bright, glistening. Youth should frolic, should be sprightly. It should play its cricket, its tennis, its handball. It should run and leap; it should laugh, should sing madrigals and glees, carol with the lark, ring out in chanties, folk songs, ballads, roundelays"—

He talked on. At any instant Mr. Schofield held himself ready to cough vehemently and shout, "More chicken," to drown out Penrod in case the fatal words again fell from those eloquent lips, and Mrs. Schofield and Margaret kept themselves prepared at all times to assist him. So passed a threatening meal, which Mrs. Schofield hurried by every means within decency to its conclusion. She felt that somehow they would be safer out in the dark of the front porch and led the way thither as soon as possible.

"No cigar, I thank you," Mr. Kinosling, establishing himself in a wicker chair beside Margaret, waved away her father's proffer. "I do not smoke. I have never tasted tobacco in any form." Mrs. Schofield was confirmed in her opinion that this would be an ideal son-in-law. Mr. Schofield was not so sure.

"No," said Mr. Kinosling. "No tobacco for me. No cigar, no pipe, no cigarette, no cheroot. For me a book—a volume of poems, perhaps. Verses, rimes, lines metrical and cadenced—those are my dissipation. Tennyson by preference—'Maud' or 'Idylls of the King,' poetry of the sound Victorian days. There is none later. Or Longfellow will rest me in a tired hour. Yes, for me a book—a volume in the hand, held lightly between the fingers."

Mr. Kinosling looked pleasantly at his fingers as he spoke, waving his hand in a curving gesture which brought it into the light of a window faintly illumined from the interior of the house. Then he passed those graceful fingers over his hair and turned toward Penrod, who was perched upon the railing in a dark corner.

"The evening is touched with a slight coolness," said Mr. Kinosling. "Perhaps I may request the little gentleman"—

"R'gr-r-ruff" coughed Mr. Schofield. "You'd better change your mind about a cigar."

"No, I thank you. I was about to request the lit"—

(To be continued.)

Greatest Man in Missouri

Gov. Major, we hear, is to be called upon to name Missouri's greatest man. Not the one who has been, mind you, but the one who is. It seems the authorities of the Panama-Pacific Exposition at San Francisco want to know, for some purpose yet to be divulged. Perhaps they want to put him on exhibition in a vitalized Mrs. Jarley's waxworks, a sort of living picture of American pre-eminences. Perhaps—but it is useless to addle one's brains with conjectures as to the designs of these coastal exposition managers. Anything is possible, even the worst. Let us confine ourselves to Gov. Major and his problem. It is a difficult and delicate task that is put before him. Whom shall he say? The mirror reflects an easy answer, but shrinking modesty will instantly compel a refusal. Beginning thus a process of elimination, where shall he stop and say "Thou art the man!" What constitutes greatness? A tentative list of possibilities is presented by a Jefferson City correspondent. One quickly perceives that it is composed entirely of democratic politicians. Surely, surely, the governor will not confine himself within such narrow limits. Political sapiency may be a test of greatness. We do not concede it absolutely, but it may be. Yet, even so, the democratic party in Missouri does not possess all of it. It may be questioned whether it possesses any of it. There are reasons, grave reasons, immediately present reasons, even omnipresent reasons, for doubt on that point. But, however that may be, we are quite certain that greatness is not restricted to the occupants or ex-occupants of public office. There are some in the republican party now who are entitled to the positive adjective—yes, indeed, right here in Missouri!—but we are not sure that the superlative could be properly applied even to one of them.

We would not presume to offer a suggestion to the governor in this ticklish matter, but we do appeal to him to look abroad, even unto the far horizons of the commonwealth. The limitations of Jefferson City, yea, even of the democratic party, are too closely circumscribed for such an inquiry as this. It may be, governor, that the greatest man in Missouri is one you never heard of.—Globe-Democrat.